# DISCOVERY

# Potentialities in office technology and management: a panacea for women empowerment in Nigeria

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**General Note**

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## ABSTRACT

In X-raying the potentialities of Office Technology and Management (OTM) in women empowerment in Nigerian society, the paper highlighted basic concepts of Office Technology and Management; goals and objectives of Office Technology and Management programme of Vocational Education. The paper also discussed the imperatives of empowering Nigerian women through a highly utilitarian discipline that has the potentials to turn around its beneficiaries to become an embodiment of growth and development in the society. The importance of women empowerment and barriers to women empowerment in Nigeria were highlighted. The paper recommended among others, that women should be encouraged to enroll for courses in OTM as a veritable tool for economic liberation.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Technology, Management

# 1. INTRODUCTION

According to National Policy of Education (2004) the Federal Government of Nigeria, Nigeria is an egalitarian society where all citizens, irrespective of their age, ethnic group, race, sex, religion and political lineage, are supposed to have equal opportunities. The Nigerian constitution emphasised that no citizen shall, by any means, be discriminated against. By implication, this denotes that any opportunity accorded a male child must be enjoyed by the female child.

Going by the National Policy on Education (2004) stipulation on equal educational opportunities for all citizens and the need to utilise the talents of its citizens, one may think that the bias against women in administrative management and decision making positions is not serious and does not exist. This is a deception. The central truth has been that, there is a bias in accepting women as competent and capable enough to fill management and decision making positions. Gender imbalance exists in almost all spheres of human endeavour. Practically, in every society, women face disadvantages relative to men in education, economic, political and social spheres of life. A look at the political appointment by all the 36 Governors in the country and the Federal Government from 1999 to date reveals that appointment had tilted much in favour of men. As a result of the discrimination against women and their not accorded equal opportunities like their male counterparts, there has been a serious yearning for women empowerment by non-governmental organisations, government agencies and women groups. In this paper, it is argued that perhaps the marginalisation of women in government appointments might be due to their lack of functional education like their male counterparts. It is against this backdrop that this paper discussed the potentialities in Office Technology and Management (OTM) as a panacea for women empowerment in Nigeria.

# 2. OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT (OTM)

## An Office

In the past, an office is pictured as a building or a room where office functions are carried out. Now that the business world has been revolutionised as a result of advanced technology, perspectives as to what an office is, had evolved in various ways: Randall House Dictionary in Omilegan (2005) defines office as a place where business is transacted or a professional service is available; while Terry in Omilegan (2005) defines an office as a place where work in connection with the preparing and furnishing of information is done. In the same vein, Okoji (1998) describes an office as any place, building or environment, where clerical works are being performed by people. Such clerical functions of an office involving papers and documents include giving, receiving, recording, summarising, arranging, safeguarding and retrieving information. Thus, an office can summarily be defined as information, communication and decision making centre, where all activities of an organization are hatched, implemented and controlled.

## Technology

The term Technology is coined from the Greek work 'texun' which means 'art' or 'craft'. Encyclopaedia Britannica defines technology as the systematic study of techniques for making and doing things. It is the mastery, utilization and application of scientific knowledge to practical tasks of invention and discoveries useful in manufacturing and industry towards satisfying the myriad needs of people. It is the systematic application of scientific knowledge and actions, usually but not exclusively in industrial productions and process. It entails the practical processes of making tools, machines, material and work procedures involved in the production of goods, perform services and or carry out other useful activities (Samuel Oluwole Salokun, 2016). The inference here is that technology is the systematic utilization of scientific knowledge for practical tasks of creating goods and services.

## Office Technology

Office Technology can be described as the technical-know-how in the office in its various forms. The processes through which office functions are performed these days have actually changed. Equipments used in the office are undergoing radical changes for easy, better and effective performance of office functions. New equipments are turned out periodically and old ones are phased out. As such, Office Technology is that important aspect of general technology which directly impacts on office procedures, especially as it concerns the methods of creating, documenting, passing, retrieval and management of information, conducting meetings and keeping records of sales and payments.

## Management

Management is defined by Oyedijo (1998) as the process of achieving objectives through utilization of resources and planning, organizing, coordinating, directing and controlling of the activities involved in organizing men, materials and money to produce or provide for a project, the goods and services which benefit the society.

It is effective application of managerial skills in achieving office functions of providing appropriate information in communication network to all sections of the organization. It is a process through which organisations achieve their objectives through appropriate planning, organizing, directing and controlling their resources, including physical, material and human (employees) resources. Management tasks entail making decisions or planning and guiding the operations that are going on in the organizations towards a given accomplishment and with the best practicable usage of the resources involved. Its task is also to enable the organizational objectives be defined and fulfilled by adapting to changes and maintaining a sustainable balance between the various and frequently conflicting pressures at work in the organization.

## 3. CONCEPT OF OFFICE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT

Office Technology and Management (OTM) can be referred to as the acquisition and development of skills, competencies, attitudes and attributes to be able to function effectively in the workplace.   OTM as a course of study can be said to be "job oriented education" which provides people with the skills and competences needed to function as entrepreneurs.   OTM imparts in people self employed skills which on graduation enable them to be job creators, self dependent, self employed. OTM also acquaints people with a sense of self-esteem and self respect. It gives an assurance that the recipients can contribute effectively and greatly to the society. It is a mind-opener which enables people to see the many aspects of the complexity of the human predicament.

## 4. POTENTIALITIES OF OTM EDUCATION

According to NCCE Minimum Standard for Colleges of Education in Nigeria, OTM is designed to equip students with secretarial/office skills for employment in various fields of endeavour and to equip the students with effective work competences and socio-psychological work skills which are very important in daily interactions with others. One of the grand objectives of the programme is the acquisition of secretarial skills which include, to:

- write in shorthand for three minutes varied materials of 1.3 syllabic intensity dictated at 80wam and transcribed in the typewriter with a minimum of 95% accuracy,
- fit properly into the office of any organization and performance professionally, the functions of a secretary which among others are relating the functions of the office to the whole organizations, attending meetings and providing information as may be requested, make accurate records of proceedings, filing and retrieving information, taking appropriate action independently when faced with challenging secretarial office problems, showing personal qualities and attributes conducive to tolerance and co-existence with work group.
- type effectively various office jobs and acquire a copying rate of 40wam on passages not below 1.3 syllabic intensity with 98% accuracy

Also, the National Board for Technical Education Minimum Standard (2004) opines that the goal of OTM at the HND level is to equip students with secretarial/office skills for employment in various fields of endeavour and equip the students with effective work competences and socio-psychological work skills which are essential in everyday interactions with others. One of the grand objectives of the programme as stipulated by NBTE (2004) is to equip students with secretarial skills for employments secretarial managers in various organizations.

The major objectives of the programme include:

1. Acquisition of secretarial skills which involves the ability to:
- write in shorthand for three minutes varied materials of 1.4 syllabic intensity dictated at 100wam and transcribe same with a minimum of 95% accuracy,
- type effectively various office jobs and acquire a copying rate of 50wam on passages not below 1.3 syllabic intensity with 98% accuracy,
- fit properly into the office of any organization and performance professionally, the functions of a secretary which among others are relating the functions of the office to the whole organization, attending meetings and providing information as may be required, make accurate records of proceedings, filing and retrieving information, taking appropriate action independently when faced with challenging secretarial office problems, showing personal qualities and attributes conducive to tolerance and co-existence with the work group.
2. Acquisition of General Education.
3. Laying foundation for Advanced Studies.

From the above goal and objectives, OTM education is a functional, practical, qualitative education that can provide opportunities for all especially the women folk. Also, it aids the quality of women as well as their incorporation into nation building and development programmes of their respective communities. Female OTM graduates can be engaged in any human endeavours (economy, education, agriculture, health, politics, tourism, transport, etc) and they will perform excellently well as their male counterparts. A good training in OTM, will not only exhume the intelligent and creative prows of women, but also stand them out as co-contributors to National development. They will no more be denied access to develop opportunities that can enlace their status and well being in the society.

## 5. CONCEPT OF EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment can be defined as the ability to overcome the structural problem that hinders a person to excel. It is also the power, authority and consent bestowed on a person to carry out certain activities on his/her own without interference from anybody. Therefore, to empower a person means to allow that person take charge/control and act in order to overcome problems that stand in his/her ways. This puts a strong emphasis on participation in societal structure and formal decision making and in the economic sphere, as well it also portend the ability to have an income that qualifies and guarantees that individuals in economic decision making. Empowerment connotes capability to effective control of one's life by being well informed and equipped with education, finance and relevant skills and to take decisions and actions devoid of any external influence and hindrance (Olafare et al. 2016). The process of empowerment is dynamic and may involve four stages thus:

- Access: being able to have access to public resources.
- Centralization: being aware of their rights and giving cognizance to gender inequalities.
- Action: being able to act on their connections and desires and increase their participation in domestic and public decision making and other activities that affect directly, their lives.
- Equality: having fair access to control and management of public resources including political power.

## 6. CONCEPT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women empowerment involves gaining a voice, having mobility and establishing a public presence and that woman can empower themselves by having some control over various/diverse aspect of their daily lives. Women empowerment programme involves the provision of opportunities for disadvantaged women to learn new jobs and business skills as they work to better their lives. The programme usually, is borne out of the desire to assist struggling women, earn a stable income. Through education and hands on training, the empowerment programme provides women with unique job skills, confidence in their abilities and a desire to strive for personal success.

Women empowerment connotes developing of mental and physical capacity, power or skills in women for them to have enhanced social, cultural, political and economic status. The attainment of and physical development, and acquisition of power and skill, is made possible via education.

Women empowerment is a practice whereby women are liberated to take charge or control their affairs and to overcome structural inequalities which that have hitherto put them at disadvantaged positions. This denotes mobilizing them to have access to resources, education, political, social and economic as well as other traditional/cultural values in the society like their male counterparts do.

## 7. IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The goal of women empowerment programme is to enhance the quality of use for women and as well, as incorporate them as co-contributors to nation building and developmental programmes. It is very essential to bring to the lime-light the benefits accruing from women empowerment as this will highlight justification for the programme. These benefits are as follows:

- it enhances equitable and accelerated development which enhance women capacity in other spheres of life;
- it promotes participation of women in social, political and economic life of the nation;
- it enables women to build personal capacities and contribute to the growth and development of Nigeria;
- it eliminates discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the female child;
- it strengthens legal systems aimed at eliminating all forms of discrimination against women and the female child;
- it ensures that women's views and needs are adequately addressed; and

- it aids women access to employment, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, equal recognition to mention just a few.

## 8. BARRIERS TO WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA

There are many barriers to women empowerment in Nigeria. Among these barriers are:

- Administrative Barrier**:** In most developing countries, particularly in Nigeria, women are hindered from engaging in some administrative spheres except they get permission from their husbands.
- Educational Barrier: Most parents, particularly in the rural areas have refused to cherish the importance of educating their female children unlike their male counterparts. For instance, most muslim parents in the Northern part of Nigeria are reluctant to send their female children to school in order to protect them from undesirable external influences. Also, in the Eastern States of Nigeria, female children are sent out as house helps to work and attract money for the training of their male siblings at home who are more valued for country development. Inaccessibility of women to basic education denies them the ability to develop their potentials and to acquire skills necessary to make meaningful contributions to national development.
- Financial Barrier: Inadequate finance is a crucial hindrance to effective female participation in politics in Nigeria. Non-financial buoyancy of large proportions of the Nigerian female population poses an impediment to their participation in income yielding activities and thus, politics.
- Cultural/Traditional Barrier: There is a belief that exposing women to deep cultural practices, especially those that involve artistic and intelligent tendencies are against tradition and cultural ethos. By denying them of utilising their creative and intelligent acumen, which constitute the science of an entire phenomenon portray the realities of life externally mystified.
- Political Barrier**:** Women usually constitute a smaller percentage of political parties' membership in Nigeria. This is majorly due to social, cultural and religious obstacles in the different Nigerian communities which often place them at the background. People in many communities still hold the erroneous belief that kitchen is the women rightful place, hence only very few educated and enlightened men allow their wives to play politics. These obstacles hinder women's empowerment in most parts of Nigeria.

## 9. OTM AS A VERITABLE TOOL FOR PROMOTING WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA

There are many ways that OTM can promote women empowerment in Nigeria. These include:

- OTM prepares its recipients with entrepreneurial skills and capabilities to establish and run small scale enterprises.
- Since knowledge is power, OTM reduces the social, economic and political inequalities which could be suffered by its women recipient.
- OTM equips its recipients with the understanding of the economy with the aim of functioning effectively and efficiently and to be self-reliant, empowers that capacity of women for gainful employment. Gainful employments are an important avenue through which the women can add value to the development of the country. They can be employed in forms providing services in education, legal and business.
- OTM equips its recipient with skills, knowledge and technical know-how which make them to possess an improved welfare and increased standard of living.
- OTM is a vital transformational tool and a formidable instrument for social-economic empowerment of its recipients. It has the potentiality for producing and supplying the required personnel to propel the economy out of poverty. This can be done through its various programmes, which instil values of self-reliance in its recipient and also equip them with knowledge and skills for gainful self-employment
- It exposes women to technological skills (ICT) which place them at vantage positions to exploit business opportunities.
- The accounting knowledge which OTM inculcates in its recipients help them in the day-to-day running of business affairs by keeping track of all transactions that go on in the business.
- The skills, abilities and knowledge that are imparted by OTM enable its women beneficiaries to exercise authority and control over those who lack training in OTM
- OTM empowers its women recipients with knowledge and understanding of the prevailing trends in business and office affairs. With the knowledge and abilities that OTM offers, horizon of women recipients have no bound, as OTM is a practical and realistic programme that empowers its women recipients with skills needed for challenges of tomorrow.
- The world these days is driven by technology and every activity of man now follows the path charted by technology. People talk of e-banking, e-commerce, e-marketing, e-mail just to mention a few. OTM embraces technology in all its ramifications

which make its recipients relevant in the society as they become better equipped to meet the challenges of the emerging new world of technology.

- OTM empowers women recipients to become relevant contribution to the growth and sustenance of the society. It provides a platform for social and technological integration, thereby accelerating overall growth of the nation. Everyone seeks relevance and cognisance in the society and it is only those who have something to offer the society that will be relevant in the emerging new world order. Women with OTM skills become key players in this regard.

## 10. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that OTM is a dynamic and functional course which can serve as a vehicle for effective transition especially in women`s quest for employment and societal recognition in the present competitive world socio, political-economy.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the identified barriers inhibiting effective empowerment of women, particularly in developing nations, the following recommendations were made:

- More emphasis should be placed on the importance of the female child education.
- Greater attention should be given to OTM programmes, especially as to how it can benefit the women folk.
- Women should be accorded equal access to OTM irrespective of their ethnic groups, race geographical location, economic circumstances, religious belief and sex.
- As a means to achieving the MDG, women with requisite qualification, should be accorded recognition in decision making and power sharing at all levels. Women should be given more space to operate in politics like their male counterparts. Scholarship should be given to married women and girls who have flare for OTM so as to enhance their enrolment for the course.
- The industrial training scheme should be well organized to incorporate more female recipients in OTM, and thereby prepare them for the world of works.

**Conflict of Interest**

None

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